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ABSTRACT

This study used participant observation, student interviews, reflective journals, and discussions with faculty members and administrators to examine multicultural aspects at an historically black college. It reviews three theoretical approaches: (1) the theory of John Ogbu, which classifies minority groups in the United States as either voluntary or involuntary, with African Americans an involuntary minority group; (2) the theory of A. Wade Boykin, which distinguishes the different cultural perspectives of African American students from the traditional educational perspective; and (3) the Harrington-Austin and Dibona theory that holds that many historically black colleges tend to replace the Eurocentric culture for an Afrocentric one instead of exposing students to multicultural perspectives. It notes the need for African American students to achieve bicultural competence and suggests a variety of teaching approaches to this end, including presenting historical information to provide context and models, implementing cooperative rather than individualistic goal structures, emphasizing active rather than passive activities, promoting oral and creative alternatives to written assignments, and exposing students to the experiences of other minorities. (DB)

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THE MOCCASIN ON THE OTHER FOOT DILEMMA: MULTICULTURAL STRATEGIES AT A HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE

Presented at AERA Annual Meeting April 16, 1998
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How can multicultural lessons be most effectively applied at historically black colleges and universities? While teaching preservice teachers at three historically white colleges, I had considered multicultural education to be a significant aspect of all my courses (Carter, 1995). When I then started teaching at a historically black university, it became necessary to evaluate both the perspectives of my students and strategies for infusing multicultural education in this new environment. This paper is an account of my informed (by student interviews, reflective journals, faculty conversations, and participant observations) musings on these topics during my first year at a historically black university.

LITERATURE

According to John Ogbu (1995a, 1995b), people in the United States can be classified into voluntary and involuntary minorities. Voluntary minorities are those who came to the United States of their own free will because they believed this would be advantageous for them. African-Americans are members of a group which he labels involuntary minorities (along with Latinos, Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Native Alaskans). These are ethnic groups whose origins in the United States came about without their acquiescence. Often involuntary minorities lack well established cultural identities and also resent the past and present discrimination inflicted upon them by the members of the dominant culture. For these reasons, they envision adopting mainstream cultural tactics in order to insure societal success as a subtractive process. Therefore, African-American students often develop an "oppositional resistance" which inhibits them from taking full advantage of the available educational opportunities. Ogbu indicated that it was important to help these students to consider education as an additive process (a mechanism for becoming bicultural).

A. Wade Boykin (1986) indicates that there are often

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significant differences between the cultural perspectives of African-American students and those of the traditional educational establishment (see table). This dichotomy often results in adjustment problems that make it difficult for the students to succeed in school. Therefore it is vitally important to consider techniques for adapting the school culture in order to allow these students more equitable opportunities for success.

Harrington-Austin and Dibona (1993) indicate that oftentimes historically black colleges and universities tend to replace one culture with another (Eurocentric with Afrocentric). They maintain that a significant role for the historically black colleges and universities should be to expose students to a greater range of perspectives which will better prepare them for a multicultural society.

During the past year at the historically black university attempts were made to analyze these theories and any other possible information which could assist me in adapting my teaching to the cultural perspectives of my African-American students. This paper is a sharing of these observations.

METHODOLOGY

Information was gathered from participant observations, student interviews, reflective journals, and discussions with other faculty and administrators. Many aspects of student life were observed in addition to academic pursuits including: Sunday chapel services, seminars, and sporting events.

RESULTS

According to my data, the philosophy and perspectives advocated by the historically black university did assist students in becoming more aware of their cultural roots. Many prominent African-American speakers were brought to college. The chaplain put an "African-American slant" on worship services. There was an emphasis on rectifying historical misconceptions.

However, when presenting this information it was advantageous to keep in mind the goal of encouraging students to perceive: "...the learning of school cultural practices and language as an additive process."(Ogbu, 1995b, p.293). For example, consider an emphasis on facts such as Napoleon knocking the nose off the Sphinx so that it would mistakenly appear to be a White rather than Black face. This is an example of an increase in cultural knowledge which instead of providing students with a sense of empowerment with respect to their place in the society, often results in a

strengthening of oppositional attitudes.

I found that providing students with historical knowledge which illustrated bicultural approaches could oftentimes be more effective. One example of this was discussing recent events in South Africa. This information provided an example (additive) for students of Black individuals who had used the existing power structures to strengthen their position without sacrificing their own culture. Another effective historical reference was the exploits of Dr. King.

Educational models have always been a significant aspect of my courses. With respect to African-American educational models, stress was put on those like George McKenna who applied cultural solutions to accomplish successful educational goals rather than those similar to Joe Clark whose solutions involved adapting to the prevailing culture. These prototypes illustrate that it is possible to promote strong educational opportunities without selling out one's culture.

Also, the students in numerous instances seemed to benefit from teaching approaches which emphasized the cultural strengths recognized by Boykin. While obviously it is necessary to avoid stereotyping and to provide diverse options in any class, often there were opportunities to change the emphasis from Boykin's traditional traits to those more compatible with the culture. An example of this was the social time-clock orientation perspective. The official college policy with respect to tardiness and absences was that if any student was tardy to class three times this should count as one absence and a student could be failed for acquiring over three unexcused absences. Technically this meant that it was possible to fail an A student (who had perfect attendance) for being a few minutes late for one quarter of her classes. I did not enforce this rule because I thought that it was an unreasonable expectation for many of my students. However, I did start class on time and held students accountable for any information they missed thus providing an example that to be truly successful in society one needed sometimes to conform. I really believe that modeling along with a corresponding emphasis on adapting teaching approaches is the correct manner to approach this dilemma. It is definitely necessary to avoid the meritocractic view that students always need to prove themselves in traditional ways in order to be successful in society.

Many other techniques were adapted in line with Boykin's African-American approaches. Some of the more successful included: implementing cooperative rather than individualistic goal structures, emphasizing active rather than passive activities, and promoting oral and creative alternatives to assignments.

The concerns expressed by Harrington-Austin and Dibona (1993) were also found to be relevant in many instances. For example, most of my students had little or no knowledge of Latin American, Native American, Asian, or Middle Eastern history to assist them in gaining a more diverse perspective.

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Therefore, it was important to include some of the same multicultural emphases tha I had used with my white students in order to assist them in understanding and relating to other minorities. Also, in some instances the societal stereotypes (regarding African-Americans or minorities in general) had been accepted by these students and it was necessary to explore these perspectives.

DISCUSSION

This research found that it was important to take into account the traits associated with being an involuntary immigrant when teaching courses at an historically black university. Obviously, it is positive to instill a sense of pride in ones' background and to emphasize a true rendering of historical events. However, along with this it is important to emphasize the value of becoming bicultural (Ogbu's additive process) in order to improve opportunities for success.

Also there should be an emphasis on integrating the cultural qualities that Boykin advocates into the teaching perspectives of every course (while also avoiding stereotyping). This will allow a larger number of African-American students to more effectively achieve their true potential.

In addition there should be a greater emphasis on promoting a more diverse curriculum (and possibly a greater diversity of students). If students are exposed to a variety of cultural views they will not only be better qualified to succeed in a multicultural society, but will also have a more inclusive context in which to comprehend their culture.

It is also important for teacher educators to model effective approaches for students. Since our students will be teaching in increasingly diverse classrooms, it is necessary for them to understand ways to effectively reach all their students.

SIGNIFICANCE

If historically black colleges and universities are going to survive in a very competitive educational environment, they need to offer a unique approach. Many Afrocentric perspectives are being duplicated in today's African-American departments in historically white colleges (and indeed by instructors from all cultural persuasions in many courses). Even the advantage of having more black administrators and faculty members is not as distinctive as formerly (as a greater percentage of blacks are being hired at mainstream schools). Thus it is necessary for historically black

colleges and universities to be at the forefront in providing an education which is the most expedient for African-American students.

I found these three theoretical positions to be very helpful in assisting me in adapting my teaching. Obviously these views constitute the perceptions of one person based on experiences and students at one institution. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to extrapolate these perspectives to all instructors at historically black colleges and universities. However, as in any research, it is hoped that this information can be valuable to those to whom it is relevant. While this research has emphasized historically black colleges, it is felt that these suggestions are also valuable for mainstream colleges. Some of these applications should also be pertinent for all students not simply African-Americans or minorities in general.

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RESEARCH (A. WADE BOYKIN)

ALTERNATIVE CULTURE	TRADITIONAL SCHOOL
Spirituality	Materialism
Harmony with Nature	Mastery over Nature
Movement & Verve	Impulse Control
Affect	Reason
Communalism	Separatedness
Individualism	Conformity
Oral Tradition	Print Culture
Social Time Perspective	Clock Orientation